

ANNOUNCEMENT OF FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Federal Agency Name(s): National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce

Funding Opportunity Title: Cooperative Research Program (CRP)

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOAA-NMFS-SE-2016-2004511

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 11.454, Unallied Management Projects

Dates: Applications must be received on grants.gov by 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on September 4, 2015 to be considered for funding. Please note: Validation or rejection of your application by Grants.gov may take up to 2 business days after submission. Please consider this process in developing your submission timeline.

Funding Opportunity Description: The Cooperative Research Program (CRP) provides opportunity to compete for financial assistance for projects seeking to improve and strengthen the relationship between fisheries researchers from NMFS, state fishery agencies, and universities and the U.S. fishing industry (recreational and commercial) in the Gulf of Mexico (FL, AL, MS, LA, TX), South Atlantic (FL, NC, SC, GA) and Caribbean (USVI and Puerto Rico). The program bolsters partnerships by providing a way for involving commercial and recreational fishermen in the collection of fundamental fisheries information in support of management and regulatory options. This program addresses NOAA's mission to "Protect, Restore, and Manage the Use of Coastal and Ocean Resources through an Ecosystem Approach to Management."

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

CRP is a competitive Federal assistance program that funds projects seeking to improve the working relationship between fisheries researchers from NMFS, state fishery agencies, universities, and the U.S. fishing industry (recreational and commercial) in the Gulf of Mexico (FL, AL, MS, LA, TX), South Atlantic (FL, NC, SC, GA) and Caribbean (USVI and Puerto Rico). Congress has initiated cooperative research funding to increase transparency and improve the confidence that commercial and recreational fishermen have in data and analyses that support fisheries management.

B. Program Priorities

Proposals must address one of the priority areas listed below as they pertain to Federally managed species or species relevant to Federal fisheries management plans, informed by the research priorities of the South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Fishery Management Councils. The priorities are not listed in any particular order of importance. If you select more than one priority, please clearly identify on your application the priority that most closely reflects the objectives of your proposal.

Projects should focus on collecting data that aids in recovering, maintaining, or improving the status of stocks upon which fisheries depend; improving the understanding of factors affecting recruitment success and long-term sustainability of fisheries; and/or generating increased opportunities for fisheries. The main premise for a CRP project is to provide usable and relevant information to aid fishery researchers, scientists, and managers to make informed decisions.

Stocks managed under the Magnuson-Stevens Act are top priority, and we encourage research that can be utilized in future stock assessments. High priority federally managed FMP species are listed here by Fishery Management Council as a guide to assist in research species/stock selection for the Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic, Caribbean and Highly Migratory Species groups within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) for the Region.

- Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC) Priority Species, in descending order of priority: Red snapper, Greater Amberjack, Gray Triggerfish, Gag grouper, Hogfish, Tilefish, Red grouper, Yellowtail snapper, Vermillion snapper, Yellowedge grouper, Black grouper, King mackerel, Red drum, and Royal red shrimp. In the Gulf of Mexico EEZ from the west coast of Florida through Texas.

- South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) Priority Species: Vermillion

snapper, Red snapper, Snowy grouper, Tilefish, Red grouper, Black grouper, Scamp, Black sea bass, Gag grouper, Greater amberjack, White grunt, Yellowtail snapper, Gray triggerfish, Mutton Snapper, Red porgy, Dolphin, King mackerel, Spanish mackerel in the South Atlantic EEZ from North Carolina to the east coast of Florida.

- Caribbean Fishery Management Council Priority Species: yellowtail snapper, queen triggerfish, deepwater snappers, grouper complex, and parrotfish in the EEZ off Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

- HMS Species complex of Sharks, tunas and billfish

Program priorities include:

1. Commercial and Recreational Finfish:

There are several priorities within this general category that pertain to the collection of catch, effort, size frequency, bycatch, and detailed data on fishing area by vessels in the commercial and recreational fisheries for finfish species.

a. Determining the composition and disposition of bycatch and discards, such as determining the effects on discard rates of increasing size limits or reducing possession limits. Discard mortality rates currently used in assessments are generally based on small numbers of observations or are unknown. Research is needed to improve estimates of discard mortality rates that account for the effects of fish size, gear, area, season and depth of fishing.

b. Determining more efficient standardized methods to record catches accurately on a real time basis during fishing operations (e.g., electronic logbooks) that could also resolve data collection and dissemination burden on constituents.

c. Developing methods to increase at-sea observations to obtain life history information (e.g., otoliths for aging, gonads for maturity/fecundity), genetic material, or stomach contents for trophic level information.

d. Data collection sampling methodology projects to improve life history information on commercial and recreational finfish and elasmobranch species. Improved information about the age-structure of the catch (both retained and discarded), based on otoliths, vertebrae, spine or other hard-part aging techniques, will provide insight on a stock's resilience to fishing. Improved information on the reproductive characteristics of the stock, including the relationship between size or age and reproductive capacity, will provide information to refine estimates of long-term biological productivity of the stock.

e. Large Marine Ecosystem(LME) modeling of food webs, trophic structure, and recruitment in the Gulf of Mexico. Mechanistic models that characterize impacts of fisheries

and bycatch on energy flow and allocation of biomass within food webs are needed, as are models that can be scaled geographically to describe place-based or subregional food webs as well as their interactions on a Gulf-wide LME scale. Are environmental factors (light, prey type and abundance, temperature, turbulence, predators) influencing feeding, growth and recruitment success of marine fish? What are the most important environmental factors? Does fish physiology or behavior interact with environmental factors to generate favorable conditions for fish recruitment?

f. Determining the impacts of bag and size limits on species that are important to recreational and charter boat industries. Projects should emphasize the effects of alternative size limits.

g. Improving catch and effort data for private recreational fishermen. Projects should identify sample sizes, including number of intercept interviews and dock samples, required to achieve standard statistical levels of accuracy and precision.

h. Evaluating the effectiveness of artificial reefs in increasing productivity and recreational fishing opportunities. Projects should examine the value of artificial reefs to fishing communities, and estimate associated economic impacts.

i. Developing pilot cooperative surveys in the US South Atlantic that target deepwater snapper-grouper species (e.g., snowy grouper, blueline tilefish, golden tilefish) to provide accurate and precise indices of abundance and life history information.

j. Evaluating the effectiveness of Marine Protected Areas and other closed areas with regards to preventing overfishing and restoring overfished stocks.

2. Economic Studies:

a. Determining how fishing costs change when fishermen change their fishing activities regarding how, when, and where to fish, and what species to target. These changes could occur as part of a normal seasonal rotation among fisheries, or in response to changes in common management tools such as seasonal closures, area closures, industry quotas, commercial trip limits or recreational bag limits, and minimum size limits. This would reflect individual fishing trips by commercial, charter or party boats in federally managed fisheries. Includes projects that utilize fishing behavioral models to determine how fishermen change their fishing patterns and strategies regarding how, when, and where to fish, and what species to target in response to changes in common management tools such as seasonal closures, area closures, industry quotas, trip limits, and minimum size limits.

b. Estimating the impacts of proposed management alternatives on recreational fishing by fishery and mode of fishing (private boats, charter boats, head boats), and projects that evaluate the economic effects of regulations on recreational fisheries and changes in

economic surpluses.

c. Developing a system of economic incentives to reduce bycatch in commercial and/or recreational for-hire fisheries. Projects should compare the costs, potential gains, and levels of bycatch reduction associated with traditional bycatch reduction methods (such as gear, season or area restrictions) and any innovative alternative methods addressed by the project.

d. Estimating the social and economic impacts associated with management of commercial fisheries with individual transferable quotas. Currently, two IFQ programs are operational in the Gulf of Mexico: red snapper and grouper-tilefish. Periodic evaluations of the perceptions and attitudes of fishery stakeholders are necessary for a comprehensive analysis of the socioeconomic effects associated with IFQ management.

e. Estimating the social and economic impacts associated with MPA closures. Currently the Caribbean has five seasonal closures in the EEZ for spawning aggregations of fish and one no-take zone consisting of an annual closure. The size of these areas is small compared to MPAs established on the mainland, but it constitutes a significant portion of fishing grounds in the Caribbean. Although research exists on the biological impacts of several no-take zones, there is little, if any research, to estimate the impacts of closures on fishing communities.

3. Commercial Shrimp Harvest:

a. Non-trawlable areas: Investigating how habitat enhancements of non-trawlable areas could benefit shrimp fisheries. For example, artificial reefs could be established in non-trawlable areas and the impacts on shrimp and finfish populations could be evaluated. Such research should determine if enhancements would increase habitat for juvenile and adult fish, i.e., red snapper.

b. Quantification of bycatch rates: Statistical research is needed to ensure that extrapolation of the results of individual trawl bycatch surveys to the fleet are statistically valid. The procedures should account for the total range of conditions found in all major fishing areas. The research should estimate the number of scientific fishery observers that should be employed to collect bycatch information for prevailing conditions and areas. The project should describe the statistical accuracy and precision of estimates for each major fishing area in addition to the total fishing area. This is critical to improving stock assessments, especially in the Gulf of Mexico.

4. Caribbean Fisheries:

a. Cooperative projects between scientists and industry members to enhance studies of the effectiveness of MPAs in meeting their stated objectives.

b. Documenting the knowledge of commercial and recreational fishers to identify reef fish spawning aggregation and nursery grounds of juvenile fishes.

c. Determining the impact on coral reefs from commercial and recreational fishing operations. Industry participation is needed to determine the impacts of gear on coral reefs. Research should focus on diving, recreational boating and anchoring on coral reefs.

d. Improving commercial data collection capabilities.

e. Improving recreational data collection capabilities.

f. Collecting biological samples from commercial and recreational fisheries.

5. HMS Species:

For HMS species in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic EEZ from North Carolina to the east coast of Florida.

a. Provide estimates of post-release mortality of all HMS across gear types. For sharks, focus on commercially and recreationally important shark species or species that are frequently caught as bycatch.

b. Assess the impact of weak hooks on pelagic longline gear in the Gulf of Mexico and possible impacts of expanding weak use requirement to the Atlantic Ocean with a focus on minimizing bycatch (e.g., bluefin tuna, white marlin, dusky sharks, marine mammals) while maintaining or increasing target catch (e.g., swordfish, bigeye, albacore, yellowfin, or skipjack tunas).

c. Calculate fishing mortality and interactions of HMS in non-HMS fisheries (e.g., in the dolphin/wahoo fishery, shrimp trawl fishery). Examine the feasibility of gear alternatives in the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Ocean to reduce bycatch while maintaining target catch (e.g., feasibility of buoy gear for bigeye, albacore, yellowfin, and skipjack tunas, particularly bycatch characterization).

C. Program Authority

Authority for the CRP is provided by the following: 16 U.S.C. 661.

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

Approximately \$2.0 million may be available in fiscal year (FY) 2016 for projects. Actual funding availability for this program is contingent upon FY 2016 Congressional appropriations. The NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center estimates awarding approximately eight projects that will range from \$25,000 to \$250,000. The average award is \$150,000. Publication of this notice does not obligate NMFS to award any specific grant or cooperative agreement or any of the available funds.

B. Project/Award Period

The period of awards can be for a maximum period of up to 12 months. Applicants will need to compete for additional years of funding and must include a statement identifying concrete results and accomplishments from the previous year's effort. Satisfactory performance in the use of NOAA funding previously received is also required.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Proposals selected for funding will be funded through a cooperative agreement. NMFS is substantially involved as a partner in the cooperative research activities with the recipient. Substantial involvement includes planning, scheduling, conducting, and analyzing proposed project activities and frequent contact with the grantee to help solve technical problems/situations as they arise during performance of the award.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants may be institutions of higher education, nonprofits, commercial organizations, individuals, and state, local, and Indian tribal governments. Federal agencies or institutions are not eligible. Foreign governments, organizations under the jurisdiction of foreign governments, and international organizations are excluded for purposes of this solicitation since the objective of the CRP is to optimize research and development benefits from U.S. marine fishery resources.

Applicants who are not commercial or recreational fisherman must have commercial or recreational fishermen participating in their project. There must be a written agreement with a fisherman describing the involvement in the project activity and the estimated dollar amount to be provided to that fisherman in compensation for his involvement.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

Cost-sharing is not required for this program.

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

All applicants must include a written agreement with a person employed by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), who will act as a partner in the proposed research project. This written agreement must be signed by the SEFSC Director or Lab Director.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

The standard application package is available at <http://www.grants.gov>. If you do not have internet access or if Grants.gov is inaccessible, an application package may be received by contacting Dax Ruiz, Federal Grants Program Manager, NOAA/NMFS/SERO; 263 13th Avenue, South, St. Petersburg, FL, 33701, Phone: (727) 824-5324, e-mail:

Dax.Ruiz@noaa.gov

B. Content and Form of Application

1. Format Requirements:

All pages must be single-spaced and should be composed in at least a 12-point font with one-inch margins on 8 1/2 x 11 paper. The project description may not exceed 25 pages, exclusive of title page, project synopsis, literature cited, budget information, resumes of investigator, and letters of support (if any). Failure to follow the requirements will result in the rejection of the application and subsequent return.

Any PDF or other attachments that are included in an electronic application must meet the above format requirement when printed out.

2. Content Requirements:

The following information must be included. Failure to submit it will result in an application not being reviewed.

a. Signed Title Page: The Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424) must be signed by the authorized representative. Electronic signatures submitted through grants.gov satisfy this requirement.

b. Project Synopsis (1-page limit): It is critical that the project synopsis accurately describes the project being proposed and conveys all essential elements of the activities. It is imperative that potential applicants tie their proposals to one of the program priorities described in Section I.B. (Funding Opportunity Description). The Project Synopsis must identify the principal investigator(s) and a brief statement of qualifications.

c. Project Description (25-page limit): The applicant should describe and justify the project being proposed and address each of the evaluation criteria as described below in Section V. (Application Review Information). Project descriptions should include clear objectives and specific approaches to achieving those objectives, including methods, timelines, and expected outcomes.

d. Data Sharing (2-page limit): Environmental data and information collected and/or created under NOAA grants/ cooperative agreements must be made visible, accessible, and independently understandable to general users, free of charge or at minimal cost, in a timely manner (typically no later than two (2) years after the data are collected or created), except where limited by law, regulation, policy or security requirements.

1. Unless otherwise noted in the federal funding announcement, a Data/Information Sharing Plan of no more than two pages shall be required as part of the Project Narrative. A typical plan should include descriptions of the types of environmental data and information created during the course of the project; the tentative date by which data will be shared; the standards to be used for data/metadata format and content; policies addressing data stewardship and preservation; procedures for providing access, sharing, and security; and prior experience in publishing such data. The Data/Information Sharing Plan will be reviewed as part of the NOAA Standard Evaluation Criteria, Item 1 - Importance and/or Relevance and Applicability of Proposed Project to the Mission Goals.

2. The Data/Information Sharing Plan (and any subsequent revisions or updates) must be made publicly available at time of award and, thereafter, will be posted with the published data.

3. Failing to share environmental data and information in accordance with the submitted Data/Information Sharing Plan may lead to disallowed costs and be considered by NOAA when making future award decisions.

e. Literature Cited: If applicable.

f. Budget and Budget Justification: There should be a detailed budget justification accompanying the SF-424 budget forms, including the dollar amount provided to the fisherman in compensation for his involvement. Provide justifications for all budget items in sufficient detail to enable the reviewers to evaluate the appropriateness of the funding requested.

g. Resumes (2 pages maximum for each major participant).

h. Standard Application Forms: Please refer to the appropriate application package available through www.grants.gov. If you do not have internet access or if Grants.gov is inaccessible, an application package may be received by contacting Dax Ruiz, Federal Grants Program Manager, NOAA/NMFS/SERO; 263 13th Avenue, South, St. Petersburg, FL, 33701, Phone: (727) 824-5324, e-mail: Dax.Ruiz@noaa.gov.

i. NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Consequently, as part of an applicant's package, applicants are required to answer the following questions:

1. Has any National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) or other environmental compliance documentation (e.g., Endangered Species Act Biological Opinion; Letter of Concurrence or Biological Assessment/Evaluation; Clean Water Act permit; State Historic Preservation Officer consultation; state environmental compliance documentation (mini-NEPA); etc.) been completed? If yes, list the environmental compliance documentation that has been completed and provide copies of the documentation as appropriate.

2. Would the proposed activity or environmental impacts of the activity be subject to public controversy? If yes, describe the potential controversy.

3. Would the proposed activity have potential environmental impacts that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks? If yes, describe the impacts that are uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

4. Is the proposed activity related to other activities (both NOAA and non-NOAA that together may cumulatively adversely impact the environment? For example, the proposed activity is one of a series of projects that together may cause a change in the pattern of pollutant discharge, traffic generation, economic change, flood plain change, or land use. If yes, briefly describe the other activities and discuss how the related projects would have cumulative impacts on the environment.

5. Would the proposed activity involve a non-native species? If yes, describe how the non-native species is involved.

6. Would the proposed activity occur within a unique geographic area of notable recreational, ecological, scientific, cultural, historical, scenic or aesthetic importance? If yes, describe the area, including the name or designation if known.

7. Would the proposed activity affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources? If yes, describe the

impact.

8. Would the proposed activity affect public health or safety? The effects may be adverse or beneficial and temporary, long-term, or permanent. If yes, describe the effects and the circumstances that would cause these impacts.

9. Would the proposed activity affect directly or indirectly, in an adverse or beneficial manner, any listed endangered, threatened, or otherwise protected species or their critical habitat under federal and state laws including the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act? If yes, name the species and/or habitat that will be impacted and describe the circumstances that would impact the species and/or habitat.

j. Applications must identify the principal participants, and include copies of any agreements describing the specific tasks to be performed by participants. Project applications should give a clear presentation of the proposed work, the methods for carrying out the project, its relevance to managing and enhancing the use of Gulf of Mexico and/or South Atlantic fishery resources, and cost estimates as they relate to specific aspects of the project. Budgets must include a detailed breakdown, by category of expenditures, with appropriate justification for both the Federal and non-Federal shares.

k. Applications should exhibit familiarity with related work that is completed or ongoing. Proposals should state whether the research applies to the Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic or North Atlantic for highly migratory species or multiple areas. Successful applicants are required to collect and manage data in accordance with standardized procedures and format approved or specified by NMFS and to participate with NMFS in specific cooperative activities that are determined by consultations between NMFS and successful applicants before project grants are awarded. All data collected as part of an awarded grant must be provided to the National Marine Fisheries Service.

All applicants must include a written agreement with a person employed by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), who will act as a partner in the proposed research project. The NMFS partner will assist the applicant to develop a design for the project to assure that the outcome will provide suitable, scientific data and results to support needed fisheries management information.

l. Applicants must have a Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number (www.dnb.com) and be registered in the Systems for Award Management (SAM) (www.sam.gov). Allow a minimum of thirty days to receive a DUNS number and to be registered in SAM. Applicants are strongly encouraged not to wait until the application deadline date to begin the application process through <http://www.grants.gov>.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Applications must be received by www.grants.gov , postmarked, or provided to a delivery service by 5:00 PM Eastern Standard Time (EST) on September 4, 2015. Note: It may take www.grants.gov up to two (2) business days to validate or reject an application. Please keep this in mind when developing your submission timeline. Use of U.S. mail or another delivery service must be documented with a receipt. Applications received later than 5 calendar days following the closing date will not be accepted. No facsimile or electronic mail applications will be accepted. See Section IV F. Other Submission Requirements for complete mailing information.

D. Intergovernmental Review

Applications submitted by state and local governments are subject to the provisions of Executive Order (E.O.) 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs. Any applicant submitting an application for funding is required to complete item 16 on SF-424 regarding clearance by the State Single Point of Contact (SPOC) established as a result of E.O. 12372. To find out about and comply with a State's process under EO 12372, the names, addresses and phone numbers of participating SPOCs are listed in the Office of Management and Budget's home page at:
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/spoc.html>.

E. Funding Restrictions

Indirect Costs - If an applicant has not previously established an indirect cost rate with a Federal agency they may choose to negotiate a rate with the Department of Commerce or use the de minimis indirect cost rate of 10% of MTDC (as allowable under 2 C.F.R. §200.414). The negotiation and approval of a rate is subject to the procedures required by NOAA and the Department of Commerce Standard Terms and Conditions Section B.06. The NOAA contact for indirect or facilities and administrative costs is:

Lamar Revis, Grants Officer

NOAA Grants Management Division

1325 East West Highway

9th Floor

Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

lamar.revis@noaa.gov

Construction is not an allowable activity under this program. Therefore, applications will not be accepted for construction projects.

F. Other Submission Requirements

Applicants should submit applications electronically through <http://www.Grants.gov>. Applicants should note that it can take between 3-5 business days or as long as 3 weeks to register with Grants.Gov if all steps are not completed in a timely manner, and registration is required only once. Users of Grants.gov will be able to download a copy of the application package, complete it off line, and then upload and submit the application via the Grants.gov site. If an applicant has problems downloading the application forms from Grants.gov, contact Grants.gov Customer Support at 1-800-518-4726 or support@Grants.gov.

If an applicant does not have Internet access or if Grants.gov is inaccessible, paper applications will be accepted. Paper applications must be submitted with completed, signed, original forms in hard copy and an electronic copy of the entire application on CD, including scanned signed forms. If the applicant has completed the entire application in Grants.gov but is unable to submit it via Grants.gov, then this application package should be provided via CD along with printed and signed versions of forms SF-424, SF-424B, and CD-511. The authorized representative MUST sign and date these forms over the printed signature that will appear in the signature box. Paper applications should be printed on one side only, on 8.5" x 11" paper, and should not be bound in any manner.

Applicants who are not commercial or recreational fisherman must have commercial or recreational fishermen participating in their project. There must be a written agreement with a fisherman describing the involvement in the project activity and the estimated dollar amount to be provided to that fisherman in compensation for his involvement. Failure to submit it will result in an application not being reviewed.

Paper applications must be postmarked or provided to a delivery service and documented with a receipt and sent to: Dax Ruiz, Federal Grants Program Manager, NOAA/NMFS/SERO; 263 13th Avenue, South, St. Petersburg, FL, 33701, Phone: (727) 824-5324, e-mail: Dax.Ruiz@noaa.gov

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

Applications responsive to this solicitation will be evaluated by three or more appropriate private and/or public sector experts to determine their technical merit. These reviewers will provide individual evaluations of the proposals. No consensus advice will be given. These reviewers provide comments and assign scores to the applications based on the following criteria, with the points shown in parentheses:

1. Importance/relevance and applicability of proposed projects to the program goals (40 points):

This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, Federal, regional, state, or local activities.

Does the proposal describe its relevance to a Cooperative Research Program Priority, and how information gathered will contribute to NOAA's mission to enhance the understanding of the fishery resource and contribute to the body of information on which management decisions are made (20 pts)? Does this study address an important problem, providing a clear definition of the problem, need, issue, or research need (5 pts)? Is the participation of U.S. fishermen or industry meaningfully incorporated into the project design (15 pts)

2. Technical/scientific merit (40 points):

This criterion assesses whether the approach is technically sound and/or innovative, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear project goals and objectives. Proposals should provide a clear definition of the approach to be used, including descriptions of field work, theoretical studies, and laboratory analysis to support the proposed research.

Are the conceptual framework, design, methods, and analyses adequately developed, well-integrated, and appropriate to the aims of the project (15 pts)? Is sufficient detail provided about the methods proposed for monitoring and evaluating the success of the project, and are they appropriate (10 pts)? Are the objectives in the proposal clearly defined and focused, realistic and attainable within the proposed project period (10 pts)? Does the project demonstrate support, cooperation, and/or collaboration with the fishing industry (5 pts)

3. Overall qualifications of applicants (no points):

This criterion ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. This criterion is not used by the CRP program.

4. Project costs (20 points):

This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time frame.

Is the proposed budget sufficiently detailed, with appropriate breakdown and justification of costs by object class (10 pts)? Is the proposed budget cost-effective and realistic based on the applicant's stated objectives and time frame (10 pts)

5. Outreach and education (no points):

This criterion assesses whether the project provides a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources. This criterion is not used by the CRP program.

B. Review and Selection Process

Once received, applications will be screened to ensure that they were received by the deadline date (see Submission Dates and Times); include SF 424 authenticated by an authorized representative; were submitted by an eligible applicant; address one of the funding priorities for federally managed species; and include a budget, statement of work, and milestones, and identify the principal investigator. Applications are not screened for deficiencies prior to the submission deadline. Should you independently decide it is desirable to do so, you may correct any deficiencies in your application before the deadline. After the deadline, the application must remain as submitted. If an application does not conform to the requirements and the deadline for submission has passed, the application will be returned without further consideration.

Each application will be independently reviewed and scored by at least three reviewers. These scores are then averaged to determine a final score. Applications are then ranked in descending order by the average scores. The top twenty applications will be forwarded to a panel for further review. Those applications that are not in the top twenty category will be eliminated from further consideration.

Applications that meet the top twenty ranking will be presented to a panel of non-NOAA fishery experts known as the CRP Panel. Each member of the CRP Panel individually considers: if needs of the Agency are addressed in each proposal; if the project assists industry; and if the project addresses issues that are important to regional fisheries management. Needs of the Agency follow the information identified in the Magnuson-Stevens Act, Title III, Sections 301 and 404. The individuals on the Panel provide comments and rate each of these proposals as either "Recommended for Funding" or "Not Recommended for Funding". The Panel will give no consensus advice. The Program Manager ranks the proposals in the order of preferred funding based on the number of Panel

members recommending the proposal for funding. In the event that there are two or more projects tied in the panel's percent selected category that are competing for the final available funds, all tied projects will be given equal consideration by the selecting official regardless of their peer review score. The selecting official will resolve any ties by selecting the projects that are most pertinent to the research needs as listed under the program priorities in Section I.B., at the time of selection. Program priorities are not listed in order of importance because the importance can change over time.

C. Selection Factors

The CRP Panel ratings will be provided in rank order to the Selecting Official for final funding recommendations. The Selecting Official shall award in the rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order, or in the case of a rank order tie, based on the following factors:

1. Availability of funding;
2. Balance/distribution of funds:
 - a. geographically
 - b. by type of institutions
 - c. by type of partners
 - d. by research areas
 - e. by project types
3. Duplication of other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA/federal agencies;
4. Program priorities and policy factors;
5. Applicant's prior award performance
6. Partnerships with/Participation of targeted groups;
7. Adequacy of information necessary for NOAA staff to make a NEPA determination and draft necessary documentation before recommendations for funding are made to the Grants Officer.

The Selecting Official may negotiate the funding level of the proposal. The Selecting Official makes final recommendations for award to the Grants Officer who is authorized to obligate funds.

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Subject to the availability of funds, successful applications are usually recommended for funding within 275 days from the date of publication of this notice. The earliest start date of awards (1st of a month) is approximately 425 days after the date of publication of this notice. Applicants should consider this selection and processing time in developing requested start dates for their applications. It is suggested that a September 1, 2016, start date be requested on the application.

The exact amount of funds awarded, the final scope of activities, the project duration, and specific NMFS substantial involvement with the activities of each project are determined in pre-award negotiations between the applicant, the NOAA Grants Office and the NMFS Program Office. Recipients must not initiate projects until an approved award is received from the NOAA Grants Office.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Successful applicants will receive notification that the application has been approved for funding by the NOAA Grants Office with the issuance of an award signed by a NOAA grants officer. This is the authorizing document that allows the project to begin. The award will be issued electronically to the authorizing official of the project. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified by the NMFS program office that their proposals were not selected for recommendation

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of December 30, 2014 (79 FR 78390) are applicable to this solicitation and may be accessed online at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-12-30/pdf/2014-30297.pdf>

To enable the use of a universal identifier and to enhance the quality of information available to the public as required by the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006, to the extent applicable, any proposal awarded in response to this announcement will be required to use the Central Contractor Registration and Dun and Bradstreet Universal Numbering System and be subject to reporting requirements, as identified in OMB guidance published at 2 CFR Parts 25, 170 (2013), <http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text->

In the event that an application contains information or data that you do not want disclosed prior to award for purposes other than the evaluation of the application, you should mark each page containing such information or data with the words "Privileged, Confidential, Commercial, or Financial Information - Limited Use" at the top of the page to assist NOAA in making disclosure determinations. DOC regulations implementing the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) are found at 5 U.S.C 552, which sets forth rules for DOC to make requested materials, information, and records publicly available under FOIA. The contents of funded applications may be subject to requests for release under the FOIA. Based on the information provided by you, the confidentiality of the content of funded applications will be maintained to the maximum extent permitted by law.

Limitation of Liability - Funding for potential projects in this notice is contingent upon the availability of funds. In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation costs. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) - NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicant projects or proposals which are seeking NOAA federal funding opportunities. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA Web site at www.nepa.noaa.gov/, including our NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA website at http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/ames/administrative_orders/chapter_216/216-6.html and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations website at http://ceq.hss.doe.gov/nepa/regs/ceq/toc_ceq.htm

Consequently, as part of an applicant's package, and under their description of their program activities, applicants are required to provide detailed information on the activities to be conducted, locations, sites, number and species expected to be caught, species and habitat to be affected, possible construction activities, and any environmental concerns that may exist (e.g., the use and disposal of hazardous or toxic chemicals, introduction of non-indigenous species, impacts to endangered and threatened species, aquaculture projects, and impacts to coral reef systems). In addition to providing specific information that will serve as the basis for any required impact analyses, applicants may also be requested to assist NOAA in drafting of an environmental assessment, if NOAA determines an assessment is required.

Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposal. The failure to do so shall be grounds for not selecting an application. In some cases if additional information is required after an application is selected, funds can be withheld by

the grants officer under a special award condition requiring the recipient to submit additional environmental compliance information sufficient to enable NOAA to make an assessment of any impacts that a project may have on the environment.

UNPAID OR DELINQUENT TAX LIABILITY - In accordance with current Federal appropriations law, NOAA will provide a successful corporate applicant a form to be completed by its authorized representatives certifying that the corporation has no Federally-assessed unpaid or delinquent tax liability or recent felony criminal convictions under any Federal law.

The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 includes a requirement for awardees of applicable Federal grants to report information about first-tier sub-awards and executive compensation under Federal assistance awards issued in FY 2011 or later. All awardees of applicable grants and cooperative agreements are required to report to the Federal Sub-award Reporting System (FSRS) available at www.FSRS.gov on all sub-awards over \$25,000.

C. Reporting

Unless otherwise specified by terms of the award, performance and financial reports are to be submitted semi-annually. Performance reports should include progress on identified milestones. Electronic submission of reports is required and conducted through the use of NOAA's Grants Online system. All reports will be submitted on a semi-annual schedule and must be submitted no later than 30 days following the end of each 6-month period from the start date of the award. In addition to the financial and performance reports, grant recipients will be required to submit a comprehensive final performance report 90 days after the project end date.

All data collected as part of the project must be submitted to the NMFS partner. Project data must be edited and verified as accurate by the applicant prior to being submitted to NMFS

VII. Agency Contacts

For questions regarding the application process, you may contact: Dax Ruiz, State/Federal Liaison Branch, (727) 824-5324, or Dax.Ruiz@noaa.gov.

VIII. Other Information

Applicants must have a Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number (www.dnb.com) and be registered in the Systems for Award Management (SAM) (www.sam.gov). Allow a minimum of thirty days to receive a DUNS number and to be registered in SAM. Applicants are strongly encouraged not to wait until the application deadline date to begin the application process through <http://www.grants.gov>.